IN THE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

In the Matter of Legacy Foundation Action Fund

Petitioner/Appellant,

٧.

Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission

Respondent/Appellee.

No. 15F-001-CCE

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE DECISION

HEARING: January 28, 2015, with the record held open until February 12, 2015
APPEARANCES: Brian M. Bergin, Esq., Bergin, Frakes, Smalley & Oberholtzer,
PLLC and Jason Torchinsky, Esq. (pro hac vice) Holtzman Vogel Josefiak PLLC for
Legacy Foundation Action Fund; Mary R. O'Grady, Esq. and Yaser Ali, Esq., OSBORN
MALEDON, P.A. for Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Thomas Shedden

FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1. On December 16, 2014, the Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission ("CCEC") issued a Notice of Hearing setting the above-captioned matter for hearing on January 27 and 28, 2015, at the Office of Administrative Hearings in Phoenix, Arizona.
- 2. The Notice of Hearing provided that the hearing was to consider Legacy Foundation Action Fund's ("LFAF") appeal of the CCEC's probable cause finding made on November 20, 2014, and the Order And Notice of Appealable Agency Action issued by CCEC on November 28, 2014.
- 3. The parties agreed to submit stipulated facts and that LFAF would submit an initial brief, CCEC answering or response brief, and LFAF a reply.

- 4. On January 5, 2015, the parties submitted Joint Stipulated Facts and Exhibits. The Joint Stipulated Facts are reproduced below.¹
- 5. On January 6, 2015, LFAF submitted its Opening Brief. On January 21, 2015, CCEC submitted its Answering Brief; on January 26, 2015, LFAF its Reply. The parties presented oral argument on January 28, 2015, but presented no evidence other than the Joint Stipulated Facts and Exhibits.
 - 6. On February 4, 2015, LFAF submitted a Notice of Additional Authority.

THE PARTIES' STIPULATED FACTS

Petitioner Legacy Foundation Action Fund ("LFAF") and Respondent Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission ("CCEC") hereby stipulate and agree that the facts stated below are true. The parties, however, reserve the right to dispute the relevance of any fact included in this stipulation. They also stipulate to the admissibility of the exhibits identified herein while reserving the right to dispute the relevance of any exhibits referenced in the legal arguments presented in the case.

The Parties

- 1. LFAF is organized as a social welfare organization pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 501(c)(4). LFAF was established to further the common good and general welfare of the citizens of the United States by educating the public on public policy issues, including state fiscal and tax policy, the creation of an entrepreneurial environment, education, labor-management relations, citizenship, civil rights, and government transparency issues. LFAF's purpose is described in Exhibit 1 hereto.
- 2. LFAF is not registered with the Arizona Secretary of State's Office as a political committee.
- 3. Respondent CCEC is a state agency charged with implementing and enforcing campaign finance violations under the Citizens Clean Elections Act, Article 2 Chapter 6 of Title 16 (A.R.S. §§16-940 to 16-961) (the "Act").
- 4. The CCEC receives campaign finance complaints about violations of the Act and resolves them following procedures set out in statute and rules.

¹ Although the exhibits referenced in the Stipulated Facts are not attached to this Decision, those exhibits were accepted into evidence and are part of the record in this matter.

LFAF's Advertisement

- 5. On January 9, 2014, Scott Smith, then Mayor of the City of Mesa, established his candidate campaign committee, Smith for Governor 2014, and publicly announced his candidacy. Press reports attached as Exhibit 2 indicated that Smith announced his intention to resign no later than May 2014, as mayor of Mesa.
- 6. At the time he announced his candidacy for governor, Smith was also the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors (the "Conference"). Press reports attached as Exhibit 3 indicated that Smith would leave that post when he resigned as Mesa's mayor.
- 7. Smith resigned from his position as Mayor of Mesa and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors on April 15, 2014.
- 8. On November 28, 2012, in an administrative appeal of a campaign finance enforcement, a Maricopa County Superior Court judge ruled that the definition of "expressly advocates" in A.R.S. § 16-901.01(A) was unconstitutional. See Final Judgment, *Committee for Justice & Fairness v. Arizona Secretary of State*, No. LC-2011-000734. The court did not enjoin the implementation of the statute. The Clean Elections Commission was not a party to this lawsuit; the court denied its motion to intervene.
- 9. Beginning on March 31, 2014, LFAF bought airtime and ran advertisements related to the U.S. Conference of Mayors' policy positions in the districts of three mayors who held leadership roles in the Conference.
- 10. LFAF spent \$3,395 to purchase radio advertisements in the Sacramento, California market where Kevin Johnson, the officer who succeeded Smith as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, served as mayor. These expenses are described in Exhibit 4 hereto.
- 11. LFAF spent \$2,595 to purchase radio advertisements in the Baltimore, Maryland market where the U.S. Conference of Mayors' second vice president, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, served as mayor. These expenses are described in Exhibit 4 hereto.

- 12. LFAF spent over \$260,000 to purchase television advertisements in the Phoenix, Arizona market (the "Subject Advertisement"). These purchases are described in Exhibits 4 and 5 hereto.
- 13. The advertisements in the Phoenix market were about Mesa Mayor Scott Smith and the U.S. Conference of Mayors' policy views on certain issues. The advertisement is submitted on a flash drive as Exhibit 6 and remains available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NycZZLOA OQ.
- 14. The full text of the advertisement along with screen shots is Exhibit 6 hereto. The Subject Advertisement in the Phoenix market aired for approximately two weeks from March 31, 2014, to April 14, 2014.
 - 15. Phoenix is the major media market in the State of Arizona.
- 16. LFAF did not file any report prescribed by A.R.S. § 16-914.02 concerning the Subject Advertisement.
- 17. LFAF did not file any report prescribed by A.R.S. §§ 16-941(D) and -958 concerning the Subject Advertisement.
- 18. On August 7, 2014, the Arizona Court of Appeals vacated the Superior Court's ruling concerning the constitutionality of the definition of "expressly advocates." *Committee for Justice & Fairness v. Secretary of State*, 332 P.3d 94 (2014).

Arizona Elections.

- 19. Candidate nominations for the Office of Governor for the 2014 election had to be filed at the Secretary of State's Office between April 28, 2014 and May 28, 2014.
- 20. Early voting for the primary election began on July 31, 2014. Any Arizona voter is eligible to vote during the early voting period.
 - 21. The primary election took place on August 26, 2014.
 - 22. Early voting for the general election began October 9, 2014.
 - 23. The general election took place on November 4, 2014.
- 24. Registered Republicans and persons registered as independents or as members of a party not represented on the ballot may vote in the Republican primary.

Procedural History

- 25. On July 1, 2014, counsel for the gubernatorial campaign of Mayor Smith filed a complaint with the Arizona Secretary of State and the CCEC alleging, among other things, that the Subject Advertisement amounted to "express advocacy" under Arizona law but failed to file the necessary registration and campaign finance disclosure forms with the Arizona Secretary of State and the CCEC. A copy of the Complaint is Exhibit 7 hereto.
- 26. In particular, the complaint alleged that LFAF violated A.R.S. §§ 16-914.02, -941(D) and -958(A)-(B).
- 27. The Arizona Secretary of State's Office referred the complaint to the Maricopa County Elections Department (the "Department").
- 28. By letter dated July 21, 2014, a lawyer representing the Department informed counsel for former Mayor Smith that the Department did not have reasonable cause to believe that LFAF had committed a violation of A.R.S. § 16-901.01 *et. seq.* A copy of this letter is Exhibit 8 hereto.
- 29. Meanwhile, the CCEC also initiated its regulatory process for dealing with complaints. In a letter dated July 8, 2014, the CCEC provided LFAF with notice and an opportunity to respond to the Complaint. A copy of this letter is Exhibit 9 hereto.
- 30. Following notice on July 8, 2104, LFAF filed a response with the CCEC on July 16, 2014, and appeared at a hearing before the CCEC on July 31, 2014. LFAF's response is exhibit 10.
- 31. LFAF also filed a lawsuit in Superior Court on July 18, 2014, challenging the CCEC's jurisdiction and the constitutionality of A.R.S. § 16-901(A), and seeking to enjoin the CCEC from acting on the complaint. This lawsuit was dismissed on September 23, 2014, for reasons set forth on the record. Exhibit 11. A transcript of the proceedings on the Motion to Dismiss has been ordered and will be submitted, upon receipt, as exhibit 28.
- 32. On July 28, 2014, the CCEC Executive Director provided a recommendation to the Commission on jurisdiction and express advocacy communication, a copy of which is attached as Exhibit 12. LFAF submitted a

supplemental filing to the CCEC on July 30, 2014, a copy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit 13.

- 33. On July 31, 2014, the CCEC found that it had jurisdiction to consider the allegations in the Complaint. A transcript of the July 31, 2014 CCEC meeting is Exhibit 14 hereto. LFAF also made a supplemental filing on or about August 13, 2014, to the CCEC, a copy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit 15.
- 34. The CCEC Executive Director provided a recommendation to the Commission on September 9, 2014, regarding whether there was reason to believe a violation occurred. A copy of that recommendation is Exhibit 16.
- 35. On September 11, 2014, the CCEC found reason to believe that a violation of the Act may have occurred and authorized an investigation. A transcript of this meeting is Exhibit 17 hereto. The basis for the CCEC's reason to believe finding was that the Subject Advertisement was an independent expenditure and that LFAF's failure to report those expenditures pursuant to A.R.S. 16-941(D) and -958 violated the Clean Elections Act.
- 36. On September 26, 2014, the CCEC issued a Compliance Order along with written questions to be answered under oath verifying LFAF's spending in Arizona. LFAF declined to answer the questions in a letter dated October 3, 2014, claiming that the CCEC's inquiries were not relevant to the Complaint and that the CCEC had no authority to ask about LFAF's spending in Arizona. A copy of CCEC's Compliance Order and LFAF's response are Exhibits 18 and 19 respectively.
- 37. On October 14, 2014, LFAF provided a second response to the Compliance Order, again asserting the CCEC had no authority over LFAF's advertising and challenging the CCEC's authority to issue penalties. A copy of this response is Exhibit 20 hereto.
- 38. The Executive Director submitted recommendations to the Commission regarding probable cause and potential penalties dated November 7, 2014. The probable cause recommendation is Exhibit 21 and the recommendation regarding penalties is Exhibit 22.

- 39. LFAF filed a response in opposition to the Executive Director's Probable Cause Recommendation on November 17, 2014. A copy of LFAF's response is Exhibit 23 hereto.
- 40. By letter dated November 19, 2014, counsel for former candidate Smith filed a letter with the CCEC executive director, seeking to withdraw his July 1, 2014 Complaint. A copy of this letter is Exhibit 24 hereto.
- 41. On November 20, 2014, the CCEC found probable cause to believe LFAF had violated the Clean Elections Act and authorized the assessment of \$95,460 in penalties. The penalty assessment was calculated at \$860 per day for 111 days, which was the number of days between the Commission's assessment of penalties and and its assertion of jurisdiction on July 31, 2014. The CCEC also determined that the complainant's letter seeking to withdraw the complaint did not deprive it of jurisdiction. A copy of the November 20, 2014 transcript is Exhibit 25 hereto.
- 42. The adjusted primary election spending limit for the office of Governor in the 2014 race was \$753,616. Ten percent of that amount is \$75,362.
- 43. On November 28, 2014, the CCEC issued order assessing civil penalties against LFAF and a notice of appealable agency action. A copy of this order is Exhibit 26 hereto.
- 44. In response, LFAF filed a timely request for an administrative hearing. A copy of this request for a hearing is Exhibit 27 hereto.

EXCERPTS FROM APPLICABLE STATUTES AND RULE

"Independent expenditure" means:

[A]n expenditure by a person or political committee, other than a candidate's campaign committee, that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, that is made without cooperation or consultation with any candidate or committee or agent of the candidate and that is not made in concert with or at the request or suggestion of a candidate, or any committee or agent of the candidate. Independent expenditure includes an expenditure that is subject to the requirements of section 16-917, which requires a copy of campaign literature or advertisement to be sent to a candidate named or otherwise referred to in the literature or advertisement.

ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-901(14).

"[E]xpressly advocates" means:

Making a general public communication, such as in a broadcast medium, newspaper, magazine, billboard or direct mailer referring to one or more clearly identified candidates and targeted to the electorate of that candidate(s) that in context can have no reasonable meaning other than to advocate the election or defeat of the candidate(s), as evidenced by factors such as the presentation of the candidate(s) in a favorable or unfavorable light, the targeting, placement or timing of the communication or the inclusion of statements of the candidate(s) or opponents.

ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-901.01(A)(2).

ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-941(D) provides that:

Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, any person who makes independent expenditures related to a particular office cumulatively exceeding five hundred dollars in an election cycle, with the exception of any expenditure listed in section 16-920 ... shall file reports with the secretary of state in accordance with section 16-958 so indicating, identifying the office and the candidate or group of candidates whose election or defeat is being advocated and stating whether the person is advocating election or advocating defeat.

ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-942(B) provides that:

In addition to any other penalties imposed by law, the civil penalty for a violation by or on behalf of any candidate of any reporting requirement imposed by this chapter shall be [calculated as follows] The candidate and the candidate's campaign account shall be jointly and severally responsible for any penalty imposed pursuant to this subsection.

ARIZ. ADMIN CODE section R2-20-109(F)(3) provides that:

Any person making an independent expenditure on behalf of a candidate and not timely filing a campaign finance report as required by A.R.S. § 16-941(D), A.R.S. § 16-958, or A.R.S. § 16-913 shall be subject to a civil penalty as described in A.R.S. § 16-942(B).

ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-957 provides that:

A. If the commission finds that there is reason to believe that a person has violated any provision of this article, the commission shall serve on

that person an order stating with reasonable particularity the nature of the violation and requiring compliance within fourteen days. During that period, the alleged violator may provide any explanation to the commission, comply with the order, or enter into a public administrative settlement with the commission.

B. Upon expiration of the fourteen days, if the commission finds that the alleged violator remains out of compliance, the commission shall make a public finding to that effect and issue an order assessing a civil penalty in accordance with section 16-942, unless the commission publishes findings of fact and conclusions of law expressing good cause for reducing or excusing the penalty. The violator has fourteen days from the date of issuance of the order assessing the penalty to appeal to the superior court as provided in title 12, chapter 7, article 6.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

- 1. CCEC bears the burden of persuasion. ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 41-1092.07(G)(3).
- 2. The standard of proof on all issues in this matter is that of a preponderance of the evidence. ARIZ. ADMIN. CODE § R2-19-119(A).
- 3. "Unless otherwise provided by law: 1. The party asserting a claim, right, or entitlement has the burden of proof; [and] 2. A party asserting an affirmative defense has the burden of establishing the affirmative defense...." ARIZ. ADMIN. CODE § R2-19-119(B).
 - 4. A preponderance of the evidence is:

The greater weight of the evidence, not necessarily established by the greater number of witnesses testifying to a fact but by evidence that has the most convincing force; superior evidentiary weight that, though not sufficient to free the mind wholly from all reasonable doubt, is still sufficient to incline a fair and impartial mind to one side of the issue rather than the other.

BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 1373 (10th ed. 2014).

5. The primary objective in construing statutes adopted by initiative is to give effect to the intent of the electorate. *Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board v. Janice K. Brewer*, 221 Ariz. 467, 212 P.3d 805 (2009).

- 6. Generally, if a statute is clear, the tribunal should not read into the statute words or limitations that the voters did not themselves include. *Darrah v. McClennen*, 698 Ariz. Adv. Rep. 12, 337 P.3d 550 (App. 2014); *Home Builders Association of Central Arizona v. City of Scottsdale*, 187 Ariz. 479, 483, 930 P.2d 993, 997 (1997)("Where the language of a statute is clear and unambiguous, [the tribunal is] not warranted in reading into the law words the legislature did not choose to include.")
- 7. Statutes should be considered in context to determine the intent of the entire act. "A statute is to be given such an effect that no clause, sentence or word is rendered superfluous, void, contradictory or insignificant." *Guzman v. Guzman,* 175 Ariz. 183, 187, 854 P.2d 1169,1173 (App. 1993)
- 8. The United States Supreme Court has adopted a "functional equivalent" test regarding express advocacy. Under that test, a communication is considered express advocacy only if it is susceptible to no reasonable interpretation other than an appeal to vote for or against a specific candidate. The speaker's subjective intent is irrelevant to the inquiry. The tribunal may consider the communication's context, including the timing of the communication, but these factors cannot be used as a proxy for that subjective intent. See Committee for Justice & Fairness v. Ariz. Secy. Of State's Office, 235 Ariz. 347, 332 P.3d 94, (App. 2014)(reviewing applicable federal case law).

CCEC has authority to enforce violations of the Clean Elections Act

- 9. CCEC has authority to enforce the Clean Elections Act. ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-956(A)(7).
- 10. LFAF raises three arguments intended to show that CCEC has exceeded its authority: (1) LFAF argues that because the matching funds provision of the Act has been found unconstitutional and independent expenditures are also subject to regulation under Title 16, Chapter 6, Article 1, the reporting requirements found in ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-941(D) are no longer relevant; (2) LFAF's expenditures are exempt from reporting pursuant to ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-920(A)(5); and (3) on referral from the Arizona Secretary of State's Office, the Maricopa County Elections Department found no reasonable cause to believe that LFAF had violated Title 16, Chapter 6, Article 1.

- 11. CCEC argues that: (1) the disclosure rules serve "substantial government interests" including voter education and deterrence of corruption; (2) that the exemptions found in ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-920(A)(5) do not apply; and (3) the Secretary of State/Maricopa County findings are not relevant to the Clean Elections Act.
- 12. LFAF presents no persuasive authority showing that the invalidation of the matching funds provision has eliminated CCEC's duty to enforce the remainder of the Act or that the Secretary of State's decisions regarding Article 1 limit CCEC's authority regarding Article 2.
- 13. ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-920(A)(5) applies to "[c]ontributions for use to support or oppose an initiative or referendum measure or amendment to the constitution." As such, it is not applicable to this matter.

The Subject Advertisement does not Constitute Express Advocacy

- 14. CCEC has not shown that the Subject Advertisement constitutes express advocacy intended to advocate for the defeat of Mr. Smith in the Republican primary.
- 15. As set out above, a communication expressly advocates only if there can be "no reasonable meaning other than to advocate the election or defeat of the candidate." ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 16-901.01(A)(2).
- 16. The Subject Advertisement can reasonably been seen as permissible issue advocacy based on factors including: the content of the communications; that they were aired at a time in which Mr. Smith was still the mayor of Mesa and the President of the Conference; although Mr. Smith had announced his intention to resign, he was under no legal obligation to do so and the Subject Advertisements were aired before the "window" in which candidates' nominations were due at the Secretary of State's Office; they were aired about four and one-half months before early voting started in the Republican primary, and about five and one-half months before the

² Under this standard, a showing that the Subject Advertisement can reasonably be construed as being express advocacy is not sufficient to meet the burden of proof. *Cf. Committee for Justice & Fairness*, 235 Ariz. at 351, 332 P.3d at 98 (substantial evidence can exist to support a decision even if the record also supports a different conclusion).

³ See Stipulated Fact No. 19.

election itself; and voting in the Republican primary was not limited to registered Republicans.

The Order Assessing Civil Penalties does not Comply with ARIZ. REV. STAT. Section 16-942(B)

- 17. Under ARIZ. ADMIN. CODE section R2-20-109(F)(3), a party making an independent expenditure on behalf of a candidate and not properly reporting that expenditure is subject to a penalty as descried in ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-942(B).⁴
- 18. Section 16-942(B) provides penalties for any reporting violation and that "[t]he candidate and the candidate's campaign account shall be jointly and severally responsible for <u>any</u> penalty imposed pursuant to this subsection." (Underscore added.)
- 19. CCEC argues that the portion of the statute imposing joint and several responsibility on the candidate and committee applies only when that candidate or his committee has committed the reporting violation, and does not apply when the violation is by another entity on behalf of the candidate.
- 20. Under CCEC's interpretation, the statute's sentence regarding joint and several responsibility would have no effect and would be given no meaning when assessing penalties for violations accruing under R2-20-109(F)(3)⁵ and, in other cases, it would require adding a limitation to the statute that was not included by the voters (i.e., a limitation to the effect that joint and several responsibility applies not to "any" penalty, but only to penalties for violations made by candidates or their committees).⁶

⁴ LFAF argues to the effect that the statute cannot reasonably be applied to independent expenditures because such expenditures cannot be made "on behalf" of a candidate. But the Administrative Law Judge has no authority to disregard the plain language of R2-20-109(F)(3), which by its express terms directs that a penalty shall be imposed. See, e.g., Phoenix v. Winn, 70 Ariz. 316, 220 P.2d 222 (1950)(statutes are presumed valid); Gutierrez v. Industrial Commission of Arizona, 226 Ariz. 395, 249 P.3d 1095 (2011) (statutes and rules are construed using the same principles).

⁵ Consequently, the Administrative Law Judge does not agree with CCEC's position that its interpretation harmonizes the statute and rule.

⁶ CCEC argues that its interpretation of the statute avoids an "absurd result" wherein a party making an independent expenditure would avoid any penalty. This argument is not persuasive in light of the statute's requirement that "any penalty" is to be imposed jointly and severally and because nothing in the statute precludes holding the party making the independent expenditure and the candidate and committee jointly and severally responsible. And as LFAF argues, the party making an independent expenditure would also be subject to penalties enforced by the Secretary of State's Office.

23

21. As such, CCEC's interpretation is contrary to principles of statutory construction and the Order does not meet the requirements of ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-942(B). See Guzman v. Guzman; Darrah v. McClennen.

Conclusion⁷

- 22. Because the Subject Advertisement can reasonably be seen as permissible issue advocacy, it does not constitute express advocacy as the term is defined for purposes of the Clean Elections Act. Because the Subject Advertisement is not express advocacy, LFAF did not make an independent expenditure subject to the reporting requirements of ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-941(D) and LFAF is not subject to a civil penalty under ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-942(B).
- 23. Even if the Subject Advertisement was an independent expenditure subject to the reporting requirements, the Order was not properly issued because under ARIZ. REV. STAT. section 16-942(B), the candidate on whose behalf the expenditure was made and that candidate's campaign account must be made jointly and severally responsible, which the Order does not do.
- Consequently, LFAF's appeal should be sustained and the Order 24. assessing a civil penalty rescinded.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that Legacy Foundation Action Fund's appeal is sustained; IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the November 28, 2014 Order assessing civil penalty is rescinded.

In the event of certification of the Administrative Law Judge Decision by the Director of the Office of Administrative Hearings, the effective date of the Order is five days after the date of that certification.

Done this day, March 4, 2015.

/s/ Thomas Shedden Thomas Shedden

⁷ Because the Administrative Law Judge had found that the Subject Advertisement was not express advocacy and that the Order is not in compliance with Ariz. Rev. Stat section 16-942(B), he does not address LFAF's contention that the superior court's ruling that section 16-901.01(A) was unconstitutional rendered that law unenforceable.

Administrative Law Judge

Transmitted electronically to:

Thomas Collins, Executive Director Citizens Clean Elections Commission